

WAYNE BENNETT - A LESKERNICK DIARY 1996

Monday 3 June

Day One: Called in to Sainsbury's at Taunton to stock up. Spent a small fortune on supplies. Arrived at Juliot's Well Holiday Park mid afternoon. Horizontal Cornish rain saturating everything. Erected new tent and sort of got settled. Damp and uneasy. Nothing seemed to be organised in terms of induction. I am a little disconcerted to learn that there were several sorts of accommodation options available and few who were actually camping in their tents. The site is clean and quite though the loos are quite a trek away. Met Pippa, Andy and Anna. Realised that I had met Andy at Dillington when he and his brother came over one Christmas and played their didgeridoos. Small world. Opened wine box number one. Gill arrived with Jim. Amazingly small tent. Had supper in the camp cafe. Then we dithered as to whether we should go into the bar and enter the "holiday mood" with the other residents on site - too wet to drink outside. Eventually went in and had a drink. After this we went to see Barbara and Chris - very friendly and welcoming. Good company. Back to tent and talked with Gill until 1.00am.

Tuesday 4 June

Day Two: Introductions to most people. Approached Leskernick from the north as if from behind. Quite long walk. Chris, by way of introduction to the site cooked up a story about how all these people were wandering around the landscape...coming up from the coast, how it all happened. His use of a simple make-believe narrative was a bit of a shock. Once upon a time... Where on earth did he get this rubbish from? When I questioned him he conceded that the story was a starting point - a point of departure. What a relief! Back to earth, we were told that it was quite important we try and get some radiocarbon dates for the site. Also excellent stuff about thinking uninhibitedly about things. What are our mind-sets and pre-conditions etc.? The supervisors are to be like "the senior people" - this puts them apart - inevitably. They (the supervisors) were also a bit shy and had already started work the day before. Sue was really friendly and interested which is good.

The morning was spent on familiarisation and sorting out what should be done. Barbara and Chris seemed a little layed-back about how things should be organised. Everything could be negotiated.

In the afternoon we set about the survey. It took a while to establish the methodology. What we were doing and why. I ended up doing the drawing. I suppose I am quite quick, accurate and confident with a pencil. We have devised a system of planning using a one metre square drawing frame which Chris had made, compass, tent pegs, string and a tape measure. Excellent de-brief at the end. Very inclusive and open discussion.

Wednesday 5 June

Day Three: The walk to the site seemed interminable this morning. Exhausting. I carried the water carrier for most of the way - or so it seemed. The day was a real scorcher and the sun quite fierce when the wind dropped. We carried on drawing the internal landscapes of the hut circles. Looking was seeing and like life-drawing the process was informed through the intimacy of the action. Our team went to Hut 23 to sketch and comment on the internal elevations. After this a grenade exploded concerning the methodology and its relationship with the work that Mike - who was producing a superb technical excavation drawing. His work was using a different mind-set to ours. Our purpose was different. Both were relevant to their purpose but fundamentally different. We seemed to get over this by us agreeing to do our own sketch plan of Hut 23 not as an alternative to

Mike's but to complete the record in the manner in which we had been recording the other Huts. Mike has lunch alone on the top of the hill. We do another hut. Quite scrappy but again when looking discovering lots of surprising detail.

We worked with Cristel today - she was not really informed about the Bronze Age or what the site could potentially represent. She genuinely didn't realise that we were working on an essentially relict prehistoric landscape. A newcomer. That was okay but it slowed things down a bit because she couldn't quickly grasp what we were trying to do and why. I suppose both Gill and I were used to looking at hut circles and cairns on Dartmoor and could recognise the differences between natural, placed, displaced etc. Cristel is a sweet person and we were very gentle and patient! Towards the end of the day our energy was seriously flagging - the sun had taken it out of us.

Gill cooked an excellent Mozzarella Pasta dish. I really enjoyed the cool of the evening after the heat of the day. Two pints of cider in the bar. We had a great chat about the group dynamic -especially the apparent distance between the surveying teams and those excavating.

Additional thoughts: Parasols would be a good idea. Envisioning information - how can what are doing be communicated effectively to a wider community than those who can understand/make sense of the usual excavation reports. Is there a methodology which can be accessible and more appealing to a wider constituency than those who study archaeologically. Is our purpose one of the archaeological retrieval of data or one of constructing a broader (pre)historical narrative.

Thursday 6 June

Day Four: Today was really good. We travelled to Westmoor Gate and the walk was only about 20 minutes to the site. The car journey was much longer than yesterday but we arrived fresh and ready to go - unlike yesterday when we all arrived exhausted. Anticipating an unrelenting sun I made a sun protector out of an old sheet for Helen who is working on the stone row terminal... also one for myself - Lawrence of Arabia style.

Our system of describing the huts is now working well. We are doing schematic plans - a form of annotated drawing the key components. Everyone has a good look and we talk through what we consider to be the main construction elements and what we are looking at in terms of changes in form due to collapse - an estimate of the taphonomy of the site. Some of the structures are very denuded and one wonders where the all the stones have gone. Many may be buried beneath the turf surface. The close examination through looking is like excavation with the eye. Today we recognised a superb block of white quartz within a hut which was structurally organised on the cardinal points. We have been really impressed at the near-perfect geometry. Even through the tumble of fallen stones we can measure almost perfect circles and uniform wall thicknesses. On the huts we did today the key focus/alignment seems to be the very visible cairn on Brown Gelly...or maybe just Brown Gelly itself.

The day was very hot. For the breaks we decided to stay among the stones on the hillside as it was cooler than at the base-camp tent. For lunch we came down and joined everyone. All in all the day went splendidly.

Tentatively arranged to go to The Minions next Thursday to mark out the stone avenue which our Exeter Group have identified. It would be really good to get another opinion. Tomorrow is our day

off so Gill and I are going to have a lazy morning and potter about. In the afternoon we will see if we feel up to walking to Rough Tor and Brown Willy.

This evening WB is to do egg & chips for Gill, Anna and a new arrival who she has gone to get from Bodmin station.

Friday 7 June

Day Five: Last night we had a really good discussion after dinner. Our new arrival - Gary - is good company; very enthusiastic, gentle and a great sense of humour. We killed another three litre wine box with no difficulty.

Barbara, Sue and Chris have gone off back to London to moderate the degree marks. Lie in until 10am. When we finally get up we decide to go off into Camleford with Anna in search of breakfast. After a superb value full breakfast with loads of fresh brew coffee we visit the museum which also doubles as the Tourist Information Centre. Full of by-gones and memorabilia the displays and parochial interpretations operate in contrast to the highly curated presentations of metropolitan museums. The prehistoric collection consisted of a small case containing various flints. The Curator - who is also the person who deals with tourist enquiries - is a local person who told us about the flints she used to collect adjacent to the Rough Tor car park.

After taking Anna back to the campsite Gill and I set off to Rough Tor. The weather was a bit threatening with occasional heavy showers. On our arrival at the car park we looked for flints - nothing. We set out first to Showery Tor across a boulder strewn hillside. Lots of field boundaries, stone arrangements, cairns and hut circles. The presence and visual impact of both Showery and Rough Tor over the landscape has a very strange and overwhelming effect. One seems in the presence of something which is extraordinary and different from the experience of other landscapes. Could the location of the settlements and monuments on the slopes of these tors be more than just intentional in an ordinary way? Gill and I are not convinced that the stones around the summit of Showery Tor is a ring cairn. Could these stones - all of similar size - be the tumbled remnants of an enclosing wall? The landscape of Rough Tor is truly extraordinary. The rocks are strange and fantastic. They look as if they have been fashioned by super-human agency. Set up and organised. There are many tomb-like chambers and fissures which go deep in the rocks. We are so taken by Rough Tor that there isn't time to go onto Brown Willy.

Before returning back to the campsite we visited the Wind Farm which we see across the valley. The blades are really huge and the application of the technology ingenious. Very complex engineering and computer controlled etc. One really does wonder how environment friendly this stuff is!

Saturday 8 June

Day Six: An extraordinary beautiful day. Cool air, clear skies and burnt legs...and that was just walking from the car to site. We are developing an intimacy with the huts which is extraordinary. To intensely examine these structures is to develop an instinct for their history - their presumed form, construction and destruction. How have the stones moved or fallen? It is a great privilege to be working with material which is probably 2500-3000 years old. An intimacy with something so very distant and inaccessible; an intimacy with events and stones organised by people long before us. As well as being quite analytical there is an honesty about using our intuition and imagination. Sharing ideas and thoughts. Creating a discourse between the so-called objective and subjective. Barbara

and Chris are great company on the hillside and seem genuinely interested in what we think and how we feel. Sue has less contact with our group but has her own energy - often seen at a distance commuting between excavations.

Leskernick is among the stones. A place in and of the stones. Known and also disguised. Veiled in stones. Referenced to hilltops and ancestral cairns.

Sunday 9 June

Day Seven: Dull morning with a gloomy forecast. High winds and rain promised. Also the day of the visit of the Prehistoric Society.

Completed the Southern Settlement except for the Hut 39 which is still being drawn by Chris and Ash. The other two excavations are going slowly with no finds but lots of interesting ideas emerging to do with their history. It seems that both the stone row terminal and Hut 23 are stranger than their original unexcavated form suggested. Most of the other huts are also strange. Some seem scrappy and others are wonderfully architectural with well defined elements. These variations may reflect the chronology of the site, status, function, history since abandonment, or more likely, combinations of all these factors. Some huts seem to have been robbed of their good stones - many orthostats have been removed. Other huts seem relatively intact.

Rain was in the air. The rain tried but the wind seemed to keep it high. Our visitors (invaders!) were spotted approaching from the south. Safe and from the cover of our hut circle we spied our guests using Penny's excellent Zeiss binoculars. We could see them but from among the stones we felt they couldn't see us. We were invisible among the stones. Leskernick had become ours. Chris, Sue and Barbara played host to the visitors. Peter Herring, Tim Champion and Bob Bewley et al. In a biting and cutting wind eventually the group came over to us and I was asked to describe the survey and interpretative methodology. I remember saying that with so many huts to survey it was important to develop an accurate but pragmatic approach to the survey work. I also made the point of saying how our work was tested for accuracy in case someone thought that our (new) way of working was somehow not up to scratch.

In the wind one wondered about roofs. Perhaps the roofs were made from turf. Grazing animals make turf. Life outside the huts would have been just as important as life inside although there almost certainly would have been a seasonal bias created by the weather conditions and other imperatives.

Leskernick must have had an identity before habitation.

We finished early at 4.30pm because of the cold wind which together with our visitation made for a disrupted day. I left Camelford at 6.00pm and got back to Toller Whelme (West Dorset) at 8.05pm - 108 miles.

Monday 10 June

Day Eight: Collected lights from Minterne. Arrived back at 12.30 lunchtime and had an interesting talk on what we had been doing and the nature of things including our methodology. Afterwards we decided to write our methodology out in draft - Gill, Anna and me.

Using recipes supplied (surprisingly - why should I be surprised?) by Chris, Gill and Anna set about working out a Thai meal for everyone. Jan (Barbara's husband) and Oliver (their friend from Norfolk) arrived. Very good company. The meal was really fantastic - the flavours were exotic. Gill and Anna let everyone have their fill first while they rested from the activity of cooking and had a well earned fag and drink. Unfortunately this meant that when their turn came for food some of the dishes had been completely taken. I sat on the grass outside the very crowded and smokey caravan. Talking to Ash I discovered that he had not been introduced to the site as we had been and so didn't feel integrated or comfortable with what everyone else was doing. I raised this, perhaps not as tactfully as I could have, with Sue later on. Maybe she thought I was being unfairly critical.

Tuesday 11 June

Day Nine: Piss awful rain. Strong winds. Abandoned day. We took Matt off to the Rough Tor car park. He was determined to go up onto the tor despite the mist and rain. A manly and heroic act. I was concerned for his safety but he returned safely at about 6.00pm - absolutely soaked.

Gary and I cooked dinner. Pork cooked in garlic and mustard. Delicious. After dinner we all went off to the bar. Talked properly to Chris (not Tilley) for the first time and discovered that he knew Miles Russell at Bournemouth. He is actually very friendly. Passionate about football. In talking he expressed concern that the excavations were very behind and that we must pull out the stops over the next few days in order to catch up.

Wednesday 12 June

Day Ten: A warm day. We went up onto the hillside to draw Hut 39. Gill got very angry with me for wanting to draw our usual groundplan as she said Chris had said that this was not necessary as we could use the pre-excavation drawing done by Chris and Ash. I was not happy with this as the interpretative process would not have been consistent with all the other drawings and indeed we had done our own drawing of Hut 23 because of this. I asked Chris and Barbara about what should be done and they said we should do a normal type of drawing. Gill wasn't having any of this and reacted very badly and aggressively. She literally ordered me to do an elevation drawing which I did. I really did not want to argue the issue. Sue gave us two hours to draw the hut and since I had completed the elevation I decided to do the plan by myself. While I was doing this Gill helped move turf from the excavation which was opening up a section of trench behind the back wall of the hut. I called Gill over after I had completed the plan and we both did the descriptive interpretation. Word had got around about our little spat (probably through Anna). Barbara mentioned it at lunchtime and suggested to Gill that she move off the survey to the excavation on Hut 21. Having completed Hut 39 the survey of the Southern Settlement was now finished. I worked on the enclosure walls with Chris and Crystal. That evening I cooked Pasta with a tomato sauce. Gill was still in a mood and did not want to talk about the events of the day! I went to bed very upset.

Thursday 13 June

Day Eleven: 8.00am departure to make up for lost time earlier in the week. Gill still in a bit of a mood with me - not very cheerful at all. She went to work on Hut 23 and I worked with Barbara checking the accuracy of the Bodmin Survey walls plan. After lunch those surveying set off to Minions to meet up with Mike Whooley(?) - the English Heritage Scheduling Officer for Cornwall and Scilly who had visited us some days earlier. He was amazingly well-informed and quite prepared to engage

in a discussion about the daily symbolic/ritual use of the landscape. The afternoon was very hot and several of the group retired prematurely back to the car park. The remainder went on up to Stowe's Pound while I marked out the presumptive stone avenue using canes. I waited two hours for them to join me but finally gave up thinking that they had somehow returned back to cars forgetting about me and my canes. At about 7.00pm I went back to the car park with canes to find Jo and Keira waiting and really quite anxious about not having seen anyone. They had been waiting about three hours! Realising that the others were still up on Stowe's Pound I went back up towards the Rillaton Barrow when I met them coming down. I showed Barbara the opposing stone stumps set in an avenue arrangement. Mike said that he was interested in looking at it more closely another time and that I should contact him when this was convenient. That evening we had a barbecue and I got very very pissed. Absolutely rat-arsed. The booze oiled the tongue and with Chris, Henry and Anna talked about politics, public school, the haves and have-nots etc. Good knock-about stuff. Anna tried to defend her Daily Mail politics...but then she's experienced nothing but a Thatcherite agenda.

Thoughts about the walls - on route up to Stowe's Pound we passed a modern(?) wall, very large with massive key stones. The final form of the wall was made from infilling with smaller stones. The effect is quite striking. The big stones catch the eye whilst the smaller stones create a sort of background rhythm. Could this presumed ordering of stones to create pattern and rhythm be an echo of prehistoric artistic expression? When we view the remnants of hut circles are we just seeing the big stones? Could the use of dynamic patterning - inside and outside - be a key expressive feature of these structures?

What about the glittering surface of stones? Naturally dulled with lichen and age perhaps the granite was scrubbed to sparkle?

To what extent was the ground cleared of stones? Cultural v natural etc.. Did it happen another way...was the landscape incorporated into themselves, their lives?

Friday 14 June

Day Twelve: Very hung-over and still drunk in the morning. Went with Cristel and Marilyn in the Jeep. Sobered up during the morning but generally very the worse for wear. Checked plans in the morning and drew two huts in the afternoon with Chris, Marilyn and Cristel. The weather was excellent. Gill was a bit friendlier today. Used the time in the evening to get straight. Drank lots of juice and eat loads of carbohydrate rich food to get the blood sugar sorted out. Henry came over for coffee. Diary and bed.

Saturday 15 June

Day Thirteen: A beautiful day marred by the discovery that a whole load of tools had been stolen. Not surprisingly Sue was very pissed off. Penny and Jo left today and lots of extra weekend workers joined. These changes altered the atmosphere of the team. I worked with Karin (Chris's wife) on the Western Settlement. She is very pregnant with twins a fact which worried me as I couldn't help think that all the bending might induce a medical emergency! Steve Shennan visited. Chris took him around and explained with obvious delight what we had discovered at Leskernick. England were playing Scotland. The commentary was avidly followed on the radio by Matt and Ben - very laddish behaviour I thought! We hid our main tools away from the tent up in the Southern Settlement.

Sunday 16 June

Day Fourteen: Last night Steve Shennan camped nearby. Called him over for coffee this morning. He was very friendly and chatty which was nice.

Today was truly exhilarating day. It started with us leaving the survey drawings in Karin's car. I decided to go back to collect them before Karin went off back to Dorset. Fortunately met Chris on route back to the car who had brought the drawings with his - thank goodness.

Spent the day with Chris surveying the Western Settlement - after a couple of huts we suddenly thought that we were not looking at huts but ring cairns! We were led to this view faced with the evidence of very poor preservation of walls, very few large stones, the lack of significant orthostats, size and form etc. All of a sudden our whole interpretation of the Western Settlement was at sea. Could the Western Settlement really be a series of mortuary or funerary enclosures? Alternatively, could we be dealing with an earlier settlement enclosure (neolithic?) which had been abandoned and some of the huts transformed into cairns? We kept stum over lunch and returned after lunch to check it our again. Later - about 3.00pm - we asked a sober-minded Barbara to come over. She as most cautious and circumspect. We were all getting a little tired and confused. What was the Western Settlement if it wasn't a settlement at all? We decided to have a good talk with Sue (who lectures on the Bronze Age) in order to refocus our work on the Western Settlement for the following day. We said we would do this in Barbara's caravan later that evening. Young Charles was very keen to be part of that discussion. Again at the end of the day we hid our tools in the Southern Settlement. Sue and Mike decided to walk back to Camelford via Brown Willy and Rough Tor. On the face of it their expedition seemed so incongruous. Sue is so small and delicate and Mike so opposite - a man's man! Egg & chips for supper. Gill and Jim decided to dine out in campsite caf. I have discovered that by preparing my packed lunch in the evening I can save loads of time in the morning - what a discovery. Met Barbara afterwards. No sign of Chris - apparently in the bar. Had a drunken discussion with Barbara, Jim and Gill about the "pleasure principal". No talk about the Bronze Age.

Monday 17 June

Day Fifteen: Warm humid day. Gave Chris a hand to start his car and then went with him and the car to the Rough Tor car park. He intends to walk back from Leskernick in the evening. Then to Leskernick. Completed checking the Southern Settlement. Chris was a bit tetchy with Barbara and vice-versa; he told her that she was being bossy! In the afternoon we (Chris and I) continued to work on the Western Settlement. Our powers of observation are now sharply honed and we are able to see subtlety. Things seem to be very scrappy and denuded outside of the compound. Certain huts have been very robbed out. Some certainly seem to have been converted into cairns. Drank from the spring below Hut 23, joined by Henry and cooled off beautifully in the River Fowey. Jan did a drawing of the excavated stone row terminal.

A curry dinner. Chris, Henry and Cristel walked from Leskernick via Brown Willy to the Rough Tor car park. 6.30pm-9.00pm with stops. Drinks in the bar and talked with Henry until quite late.

Tuesday 18 June

Day Sixteen: Chris and I continued surveying the Western Settlement. Many hands make light work! Helped move big stone in Hut 23. Cooled wine in River Fowey. At the end of the day Cristel, Chris, Barbara, Gill and I experimented in dressing the stones and taking photographs. We

created "shrines" with cloth, pasties and wine. We talked about how art could be used. We ended our evening on the hill by photographing the sunset through the quoit stone. On our return saw parachutists drop. Back at the campsite I again got pissed and we talked about how we could use art as a response to Leskernick - difficult. Dressed a scald on Sue's leg.

Wednesday 19 June

Day Seventeen: Breakfast in the cafe - very slow service. The day was very hot and close. Today tried to set up a water supply from the Spring. Dug a hole in the bog and let the disturbance settle. Not very good. If we are to use this next year (which would be a good idea especially since we boil the water) then we will need a piece of pipe and some fine mess cloth to act as a filter.

Went around the Western Enclosure with Chris and later with Henry and Matt. We were plotting bench stones and looking for clearance patterns and pathways. I got very tired and a bit fractious - especially at having to once again go around the same ground over again. Henry (and sometimes Matt) had a good knack at winding Chris up. Perhaps we were all getting LFS - Leskernick Fatigue Syndrome. Had a rather interesting discussion about a stone on top of a grounder which formed part of the enclosure wall. It looked placed rather than natural. Surprisingly, Chris thought it was natural! Needs thinking about again next year.

Hut 23, which was unusual in several regards, has turned out to be a disappointment. A few flecks of charcoal and that's all. Mike is quite depressed about it. Hut 39 is also proving to be disappointment in terms of finds...as is the terminal of the stone row. Not a single bit of pottery!!! Gave Helen a tupperware box for her to encapsulate her excavator's notes under the stone upright.

Barbara and Chris going back to London this evening. Said goodbye to Barbara near the stone row terminal and had a big hug which was nice. For dinner Macaroni, garlic, cheese and tomatoes. Chris came over, had something to eat and said goodbye.

Thursday 20 June

Day Eighteen: Rained during the night. Breakfast. Got packed slowly and returned to Dorset...arrived mid-afternoon exhausted. For some reason the journey seemed slow and very tiring. Had to stop and have forty winks in a lay-by.

Friday 21 June

Day Nineteen: Unpacked and rested. Got ready for Saturday.

Saturday 22 June

Day Twenty: Concert at Sherborne Abbey - Choir of St John's College Cambridge and the Bournemouth Sinfonietta.

Sunday 23 June

Day Twenty-One: Completely knackered. Got ready for work. Agh!